

P O E M

ON

The Death of Lieutenant Bellot,

OF THE FRENCH NAVY,

WHO PERISHED

IN THE ARTIC SEAS, AUGUST, 1858,

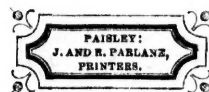
WHILE A VOLUNTEER IN ONE OF THE EXPEDITIONS IN SEARCH OF
SIR JOHN FRANKLIN.

BY

ZENO.

PAISLEY: J. & R. PARLANE.

M.DCCC.LV.



LIEUTENANT BELLOT.

ARGUMENT.

INVOCATION TO THE MUSES.—SEARCH OF MANKIND AFTER KNOWLEDGE.—
FRANKLIN'S EXPEDITION TO THE ARTIC SEAS—CONJECTURES AS TO HIS
FATE—OF THOSE WHO WENT IN SEARCH OF HIM—OF BELLOT—OF
BELLOT'S FIRST EXPEDITION—OF HIS SECOND—OF HIS CROSSING THE
ICE—OF THE STORM—OF HIS DEATH—LAMENT.

Poem.

YE Muses, who so oft in latter days
Vouchsafe to mortals your sweet voice of song,
I pray you, come and fire my chilly thoughts.
With inspiration's magic wand touch ye
My humble pen; and though unused to sing
In lofty tones or tell of mighty deeds,
It shall for once proclaim a hero's name.
Your aid then I invoke.

Since first our common ancestors were placed
In Eden's paradise—where Eve so sinned
In eating of the tree forbid by God—
Man's constant search has been for things unknown.

Some men have boldly sought to penetrate
Into the deep recesses of the mind;
To try from out that wondrous mystery
To force th' unwilling truth, and solve the deep,
The marvellous problem of the human mind;
But only found that as they wiser grew
Their wisdom proved, as it must ever do,
The hugeness of the task—the ignorance of wisdom.

There have been others who have made the sun,
The moon, the stars, and all the countless worlds
Which deck the brow of night the objects of
Their search: Have told us of sweet midnight's queen,
As beautiful, in silent majesty
She sits upon her calm, ethereal throne,
Surrounded by her shining pageantry
Eager to honor her; whose hearts do beat
And pant for joy that theirs is such a queen;
The while her brighter nobles proudly stand
With steady gaze, admiring her pale beauty.

And as her whole attendant train thus look
They gain a lustre which they yield again
Up to their mistress, when her peaceful throne
She meekly leaves, to be resumed when next
She visits them; and thus with homage mute
Their nightly task each joyously performs.

Others have chosen nature's blooming flowers.
Their study sweet is 'mong the violets,
The rose, the lily, and the thousand gems
Which are so beautiful, and so unlike
The other things of earth, that they do seem
As if their earthly mission were to tell
What Paradise was like: and thus incite
All mortals to press onward in the path
Which leads to Paradise more blessed still
Than that which Adam lost. Sweet monitors!

Among the many others who do throng
The shrine of knowledge, some there are who've made

Their homes upon the dreary ocean's waste,
To scan the unknown regions of the World.
Brave men, who have at sound of duty's call
Gone from the homes and friends they loved, and have
With stern resolves, and patriotic hearts,
Resigned each comfort which those blessings gave ;
And viewing life as but a sacred trust
Held for their country's good, have placed that life
Upon the altar of their country's greatness.
All honor to such men !
And tho' their glory 's mingled not with deeds
Of high renown—of battles fought and won
By their heroic bravery or skill ;
And tho' their spirits entered Heaven's gates
By other herald than the canon's roar ;—
Tho' history emblazon not their names
As heroes "of a hundred fights;" yet still
A grateful country, yea, a grateful world
Will ever cherish as a treasure great
The memory of such men; and proudly yield

A fame as pure, as lasting and as rich,
As tho' 'twere earned on sanguinary field
Of Waterloo—or 'mid the booming roar
Which at Trafalgar's fight did rend the air
And peeled unsparingly the knell of death
To thousands of brave hearts.

'Mong those who thus
Devoted life and all that life holds dear
To science's service and their country's weal,
Was gallant Franklin—than whom ne'er human frame
Enshrined a heart more brave. His dreary work
Was 'mid the frozen regions of the north;
To find a path among the ice bound seas
To India's warmer clime. Such was thy task
Brave Franklin! What! Didst thou fail, that thou
Hast ne'er returned to tell the world thy tale?
Or dost thou still pursue the object which
Thy daring spirit fired thee to embrace,
As not unworthy of thy noble mind?

Or is it true, as hath been said by some,
That long ere now, unknown to man, those seas
Upon whose breast 'twas thy delight to ride,
Have claimed thee as their own? Oh! is it true
That far away from where thou wast beloved—
Far from the ardent looks of friends who hoped
To soothe thy spirit in the hour of death,
That in the regions of eternal ice,
Thou and thy gallant crew were—ere yet
Success had crowned your daring enterprise—
Enshrouded in the mighty deep; as if
Those regions, which till now had kept themselves
A secret from an ever searching world,
Feared lest they should too soon be known to man!
Which is the truth? If thou art still entombed
Among the icy mountains of the north,—
If leagues of ice enslave thy energies,
Like chains which bind some noble patriot
And hold him captive at the hated will
Of tyrant King! if so, are there no more

Who'll brave again the dangers thou hast braved,
And haply save thee and thy daring crew
From threatening death? Yes, Britain's sons
Were never laggard in the hour of need.
Humanity invites them not in vain.
And while the fame of Franklin's deeds endure,
So shall the names of those who, not less brave,
Perilled their lives to bring him home amid
The praises loud of Britain's grateful sons;
And though they found him not, yet shall their names
Be cherished fondly by a grateful land.

But 'mong those noble men was one whose heart
Beat high with courage, and with honor throbbed,
Tho' in the peaceful quiet of the world
None were more loved—none more admired than he;
Yet mark him 'mid the thunder of the waves—
The fury of the wind—the tempest's shriek;
See, see, his young heart rise; no thought has he
Of danger or of death; his soul, alone, stands forth,

And in his upturned eye reveals itself,
And says, "How mighty are thy works, oh God!"
Gentle he was, yet still he could be brave.
'Mong friends he was a man, 'mong storms a hero,
Such was the young and generous BELLOT.
His fatherland was France: a worthy son
From that bright home of chivalry. His soul
Disdained the hostile thoughts which but too long
Imperial Gaul had borne to Britain's sons.
Tho' Franklin was a Briton, that to him
Was nought. He hears that some large hearted men
Will sail in search of him they fear is lost,
And eagerly this noble stranger pleads
To share with them the dangers and the toil.

Ere long a gallant ship from England's shores
Glides swiftly onward to the regions where
No summer sweets are known—no larks are heard
To sing the natal song of infant day—
No July sun ere comes with genial glow

Diffusing beauty 'mong the tender flowers—
No dewy morn' ere feeds the opening bud—
No smiling verdant hills are seen o'erspread
With flocks of sheep and little playful lambs,
Whose bleetings mingle with the shepherd's song;
But where eternal winter spreads around
Her gloomy shade; where seasons vary 'mid
The ice and snow, and tempest's howl.—
But fruitless was their search; and Britain's sons
Beheld, with heavy hearts, that ship's return.
The winter season o'er, two other ships
With flags unfurled and fluttering in the breeze,
Are guided onwards to the northern climes.
But who is he whose ardent gaze is bent
On Gallia's lovely shores, for one last glimpse
Ere yet they fade from view—alas! to him
For ever? 'Tis BELLOT: not long he looks.
But heaves a transient sigh, and turns his thoughts
To northward, and to Franklin.

A few more days and nights have passed away—
A few more breezes o'er and billows crossed,
And they are wafted to the icy seas.
In pursuit of their task a little band
Must venture forth upon the frozen sea,
To find some others who like them had gone
To search for Franklin and his missing crew.
Our Hero prays to be entrusted with
This perilous work, and soon four men are found
To brave with him the dangers of the task.
Farewell! Farewell!
Such were the parting words of those he left:
They little dreamt it was a last farewell.
As on they press, this little band do seem,
Amid the bleak unvaried wilderness
Of snow and ice, like solitary specks
Upon the sandy deserts of the east,
Or like the first few stars that timid peep
From out the murky haze that sunset leaves.
A breeze ere long arose; harmless it seemed,

And onward pressed BELLOT. But hark what voice
Is heard! And why those tones of loud alarm?
'Tis BELLOT's voice. A storm! a storm! he shouts.
A hasty counsel o'er, and on they fly
Across the ice, bound for the nearest shore.
The black clouds thicken in the threatening sky,
And shed their dark ill-omened shadows o'er
The slippery path; and still this hardy group
Rush on to gain the land before the storm,
Now gathering 'mid the clouds, can reach the earth.
The land is seen! A gleam of hope inspires
Their failing strength. Ah hope! thou strange sweet thing;
Balm of despair—misfortune's antidote;
And yet thou'lt oftentimes raise to giddiest heights
Thy helpless votary, that so thou may'st
The deadlier make his fall. Cruel art thou,
Yet merciful.
The clouds still spread, they dart across the sky,
And cause the winds to howl! and as they meet
They onward dash; like warriors gathering

To fiercest combat by the wild war cry.
Meanwhile our little band speed swiftly on,
Urged by the fury of the boisterous wind;
Like to the hunted deer which breathless flees
Before the bellowing hounds.
Speed now, ye brave ones, speed, the land draws near;
Strain every nerve—stay not your furious pace!
Now, now, a few more steps—but ah! what noise is that?
Have heaven's thunderbolts been loosed to fall
On the devoted heads of those brave men?
No, no, the raging storm has done its work.
The ice breaks up with a terrific crash,
And 'twixt the shore and them a chasm leaves.
"Haste, haste, be quick and launch the light canoe,
"And now BELLOT stay not, but to the land!"
Such was the eager cry of his brave men.
"Nay, nay," he says, "this shell can hold but two,
"And" (mark the spirit of the brave BELLOT)
"While here one man remains I shall not go—
"Tho' dangers, even death, may threaten me!"

Heroic words were these, and made them feel
Remonstrance were but vain. Unwillingly
Two of these braves are severed from their friends,
And in that little bark they reach the shore ;
Meanwhile the floe has drifted far away
With young BELLOT and two stern hearted men.
Freed from its bonds, the ice was dashed about,
And yielded to the storm's capricious will.
The snow, so pure and white—fit emblem of
Those regions whence it came—was driven to
The sea ; and mingling with the briny wave,
Changed its bright lustre for a grosser hue.
'Tis but like other things—tho' pure, when first
They come into this world, they soon receive
The taints of earthliness. The winds still roared,
The clouds were still as black and frowning like ;
And now and then, when masses huge of ice,
Tossed by the fretful blast, did chance to meet,
One long loud crash told that the storm was fierce.
In midst of this our hero and his men

Built with the gathering snows a little hut
To yield a covering from the chilling winds;
From this frail awning once BELLOR had gone
To watch the course in which the ice was borne:
Again he went, and still he safe returned;
But yet a third time he went forth. As there
He stood alone, half hidden 'mongst the snow,
And looked upon the dreary scene, he seemed
Like a lone star in a tempestuous night.
Then memory came and turned his thoughts to home.
He thinks a moment on his aged mother,
On his loved sisters, and his only brother;
And as he thinks, a thousand hallowed scenes
Flash through his noble mind; and as a tear,
Drawn from the secret fountains of his heart,
Starts kindly from that softened eye, he lifts
A prayer to heaven, and asks in meekest tones
For blessings on those loved ones and himself!
Ere yet the sainted echo of that prayer
Has reached the ear of Heaven's angelic throng—

Ere yet th' approving songs of spirits pure
Have pealed in joyous happy strains throughout
The realms celestial of th' eternal King;—
While yet those suppliant looks are meekly turned
On High, to where the prayer had gone;—e'en now,
Amid this holy scene, the unrelentless wind,
Urged by a ruthless passion to foul deeds,
Came howling onward like some angry beast
In search of prey; and as it rushing came,
It fiercer grew, till 'mid one mighty roar—
As if in triumph o'er the awful deed—
With one fell swoop it hurled him from the ice,
And dashed him down among the yawning waves.
A loud cry rose amid that fearful storm—
A cry for help! Haste, haste ye bold ones who
In shelter sit, 'ere your brave leader sinks
For evermore beneath the insatiate waves,
Who seek to add the wealth of his brave heart
To their unused hoard of plundered gain:
Haste ye, while yet those powerful arms of his,

Have strength to dash aside the angry foam—
While yet he battles manfully against
The wrath of a superior foe—ere yet
Those chilly waters freeze the flowing stream
Of his life blood, make haste and succour him.
Alas! that cry for help was heard by none
Save the wild storm; who mocking echoed it
By a loud roar of triumph!

So he went down,
Without so much e'en as a friendly look;
But 'mid the noisy tumult of the waves,
Was swallowed up, like the bright gallant bark
Amid the vortex of the whirlpool.

His comrades, when he came not, went to search
For him, but 'twas in vain: and as their eyes
Looked all around, those eyes, which ne'er till now
Had known a tear, gushed forth in streams of grief,
O'er the untimely fate of young BELLOT!
Weep on! ye brave ones, weep! and tell the world

With all the fervour of your new born tears,
How brave he was. Weep on! and smother not
That sigh instinctive rising from your hearts.
Weep France! thou land of chivalry, thou land
Of great and glorious deeds! for thou hast lost
One of thy noblest sons; and tho' his name
Doth shed a lustre o'er thy history,
Yet still a noble one is gone from earth!
Weep! Caledonia, weep!—Home of the brave—
Thou land of Wallace and of Bruce—thou land
Of liberty: Weep! England, weep!
Thou land of sympathy, thou land of hearts,
Thou land that calls it joy to celebrate
The praises of the great. Weep Italy,
And Spain—yea, Europe, weep! and spread the fame .
Of this young hero o'er the world wide,
Until within each breast—in every heart,
A monument of rich and honest fame
Is raised to honor young BELLOT: A fame
That shall not soon be lost, but which shall live.

E'en when th' unsparing hands of time efface
The eulogies of art on carved stones—
Shall live, e'en when the marble colonade,
Raised by the gratitude of Britain's sons,
Hath crumbled into dust.

BELLOT had all his life been rearing up
A monument in honor of himself.
Each kindly act—each noble sentiment—
Each deed of bravery, and generous work—
Each was a stone in the great piled heights
Of an enduring fame, sweetest and truest
Of all wordly relics: for oft we've seen
The wily coward made a glorious hero;
The wicked tyrant made a holy saint;
The Devil made a God—all by the power
Of marble statues and great epitaphs:
But Fame! thou pure impartial monument
Of words and deeds, no bribe of this vain world,
No wealth, nor power, nor kingly offering

Can e'er induce thy guileless legion voice
To swerve from truth's pure path.
Oh Fame! If thou art such as this, then tell
The world of young BELLOT. I charge thee tell
How brave he was: say he was kind, much loved,
Of gentle heart; tell how he science loved.
He loved the sea—he loved its very storms;
Tell how he loved to sit at dead of night
On the ship's deck, and thoughtful look around
Upon the swelling waves, when nought was seen
But waves and stars: Tell ye unto the world
How generous was his heart—how brave and good!
Tell how he perished in the icy seas,
In search of Franklin and his noble men;
Tell how he nobly met a sailor's grave,
Tell that the ocean was his winding sheet—
That the wild roaring waves in dirgeful tones
For ever chant his requiem!



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